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ABSTRACT

After defining and tracing the historical background of home schooling in the United States, this paper focuses on studies which deal with: (1) the socialization of home-schooled children; and (2) creativity in home-schooled children. Noting that according to the Home School Legal Defense Association the number of home-schooled children has jumped from 15,000 in the early 80s to between 750,000-1,000,000 in 1994, the paper argues that the sheer increase in numbers has forced public school educators to take notice of home schooling. The paper concludes with an interview with a couple who home school their children, in which they recount their reasons for home schooling and their experiences with the process. (Contains 11 references.) (NKA)

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Home Schooling, Socialization, and Creativity in Children

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I. Definition and History

Home schooling is becoming an increasingly popular form of education, and yet many people are unaware of exactly what home schooling is. A good beginning, then, is to define home schooling "[as] the educational alternative in which parents/guardians assume the primary responsibility for the education of their children (Preiss 1)."

Where and when did home schooling begin? It is difficult to pinpoint an exact date and location; the "alternative education" movement can be traced back as far as the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. "In Emile (1762), Rousseau argued that education, rather than ruthlessly instilling intellectual and social discipline, should seek a harmony between the organic needs of child development and the demands of social life (Pedersen et. al., ed. 45)."

Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi took that and many other ideas of Rousseau's, and implemented them in the boarding schools he ran for orphans and paupers. In 1808, Joseph Neef, a colleague of Pestalozzi's and an immigrant to America began to criticize the traditional methods of education and actively encouraged his students to question and reason for themselves (45).

The first American "homegrown" rebellion against the Industrial Age and its educational tenets came with the transcendentalist movement of the 1830s and 1840s. A. Bronson Alcott (father of Louisa May Alcott) fully practiced a transcendentalist approach to education. As he put it, "[the educator] should look to

the child to see what is to be done, rather than to the book or system. The Child is the Book (46)."

In the 1890s, Francis W. Parker also began to question the direction the American education system had taken thus far. In 1896, John Dewey, a colleague of Parker's, was placed in charge of the new University of Chicago's learning laboratory to develop new methods of schooling. Dewey and Parker both agreed on the idea that "the truest, most meaningful learning occurs through purposeful activity rather than passive reading, memorizing and reciting (47)."

European influences and developments also affected the alternative education movement in the U.S., primarily in the form of Montessori and Waldorf schools. Maria Montessori was the first woman in Italy to obtain an M.D. degree, and began her career working with "mentally deficient" children. She came to the conclusion that many of the developmental problems she saw in her clients stemmed from living in an "unstimulating environment." In response to these problems, she created a vast array of tools and teaching methods designed to compensate for the developmental problems the children suffered from. These tools and resulting methodology "became the core of the Montessori school environment (50)."

Waldorf education was founded in 1919 by Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner. He saw "human life as essentially the spritual journey of our personal souls," and designed his curriculum to "nurture the intuition, imagination, and spiritual capacities

of the child." He asserted that "true education is not the inculcation of facts and skills into a passive student, but is [instead] 'an Art -- the Art of awakening what is actually there within the human being (50).'"

The actual term "alternative education" and the distinct movement attached to it was born in what Miller calls "the culturally unsettling 1960s (51)." Educational critics such as Paul Goodman, A.S. Neill, John Holt (the so-called "grandfather of home schooling"), Jonathan Kozol, Herbert Kohl, James Herndon, and George Dennison all began vigorously attacking public schools on both educational and moral fronts.

> "They accused traditional education of stifling the aspirations and creative energies of youth, of losing the individual in a maze of bureaucratic roles, and of perpetuating a brutal competition for social success without regard for the needs of human development. These critics inspired a substantial following of parents and alternative educators who established 'free' schools and cooperatives and ultimately contributed to the rise of the home schooling movement (51-52)."

The 1970s and 1980s saw a return to the "back-to-basics" theory of education, but home schooling and other forms of alternative education still remain a powerful force in the field of education (52). Religious fundamentalists and others who disagree with contemporary education are exploring and using home schooling in ever-increasing numbers.

II. Home Schooling and the Socialization of Children

The numbers of children being schooled at home has been on the rise since the early 1980's, and this increase in numbers is forcing educators in public schools to take notice. A study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education in 1990-91 "found that 250,000-300,000 school-age children [are being] educated at home. The Home School Legal Defense Association figure this year [is even higher]: 750,000-1 million. That's up from 15,000 in the early '80s (Thomas, 1D)."

The overwhelming question on the minds of all educators is this: are there any clear-cut advantages or disadvantages to home schooling, particularly in relation to the social and emotional functioning of those children schooled at home? Lee Stough tried to answer these questions in his master's thesis in 1992. He compared "30 home schooling families and 32 conventionally schooling families with children 7 to 14 years of age [.]" Numerous tests were employed to gather data; for both sets of parents, the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales, Classroom Edition was used. The children in both groups were given the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale. An overall picture of "child-family-school interaction patterns" was obtained using the Kinetic Drawing System for Family and School (Stough, abstract).

Results showed that many criticisms of home schooling are in a large part simply overblown, or at worst, completely unfounded. The stereotypical home-schooled child is portrayed as being "shy, passive, and lethargic because of [his/her] isolation from the

normal socialization processes found in the conventional schools (18)."

The Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales (VABS) test revealed that there was no statistically significant difference in the social abilities of both samples (18-19). According to Stough's survey, children who were schooled at home gained "the necessary skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed to function in society . . . at a rate similar to that of conventionally schooled children (19)."

Critics further allege that the "self-concept" of the home-schooled child suffers from lack of exposure to a more conventional environment. The results of the Piers-Harris test showed a similar lack of statistical proof for this allegation that was found in the VABS example. Stough maintains that "insofar as self-concept is a reflector of socialization, it would appear that few home schooling children are socially deprived (19-20)." Stough also maintains that there may be sufficient evidence to indicate that some home schooled children have a higher self-concept than conventionally schooled children (20-21).

The third allegation that Stough addresses is the critics' charge that home schooled children pay some sort of "emotional toll" for their participation in the home school experience. This accusation stems from the assumption that "the home schooled child must be carrying a burden of emotional strain [from] being with the oppressive parent so much of the time, accompanied by feelings of loneliness and exclusion from the peer group (21)."

The Kinetic Family Drawing test did reveal that there were "state-oriented" emotional issues in the home school sample, but that these same issues were also present in the conventional school sample. As with the previous two tests, the statistical analysis showed nearly identical occurrences in both samples of these emotional issues (21).

Stough concludes his thesis by making a flat denial of the critics' allegations in no uncertain terms:

> "[t]he concerns expressed by teachers, parents, legislators, and administrators are unfounded. Critics should not argue self-concept, socialization, or emotional-harm rationales. Home education does not adversely influence a child's affective development and may contribute to such development (21-22)."

Chatham-Carpenter (1992) found, in a similar study, that communication with parents was important for both home and public schooled children, but that peers played more of a role for the public schoolers than for the home schoolers in "closeness and supportiveness (23)."

III. Home Schooling And Creativity

Another concern that is raised by the opponents of home schooling is creativity. Are children schooled at home coming away with a deficit in the area of creativity? Lawrence T. Williams attempted to answer this question in a survey he conducted.

The sample consisted of 343 home-schooling families across the nation, drawn from a mailing list provided by Oak Meadow

School, a national home-study school and supplier of home-schooling materials. Its curriculum "incorporates a non-sectarian, artistic, experiential and developmentally-oriented approach in its programs (5) [.]"

He measured his results using the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking-Figurative Form A (TTCT). He discovered differences in four areas:

1) goal orientation of the parents;

2) autonomy given the children;

3) motivational orientation of parents; and

4) instructional format (Williams, abstract).

One interesting difference from prior surveys was immediately discernible in the demographic portion of the survey, and that was the religious denomination of the families involved. "New age" believers made up 34.1% of the sample population. "Non-fundamental" Christians made up the second-largest group at 32.4%, and fundamental Christians were nearly at the bottom at 5.9% (9). The author comments that this distribution of religious affiliations is indicative of this sample being a much different segment of the home schooling population than has been examined in previous surveys.

Results from the Home Schooling Instructional Survey revealed that:

> "a large majority of parents fell within the 'moderate' to 'high' range of expression for autonomy (93.8%), intrinsic motivation (96.0%), and unstructured format (90.9%),

suggesting an approach that is flexible, provides a considerable amount of autonomy, and encourages intrinsic motivation in children. For the goal orientation factor, the pattern was reversed, with 91.5% of the parents reporting a 'moderate' to 'low' expression of this factor, indicating an instructional environment focused upon learning as a process, rather than a goal (10)."

As to the results of the creativity portion of the survey, home-schooled children scored significantly higher on three out of five of the TTCT subscales, "suggesting that the home-schooled children in this study were more creative that their conventionally schooled peers." The author cautions that these results should be used as:

> "descriptive data only, since there was no matched control group . . . [and] since testing conditions for those home-schooled children were significantly different from those used in the conventional classrooms from which the norms for the TTCT were derived (12)."

There are now a lot of materials which speak to home schoolers; for example, there are newsletters, books, and other materials. Administrators, educators, and legislators seem to have become less antagonistic towards home schooling; gone are the days when truant officers would routinely check on children being schooled at home to insure that they were not "cutting class."

One family of my acquaintance who home school their two sons for religious reasons were willing to share with me their home schooling philosophy.

Q: (to both parents, Greg and Debbie) What are the reasons for your decision to school your two children (Ryan, age 11, and Derek, age 10) at home?

A: There are a number of reasons, but the main ones are as follows:

1. "It is the ultimate responsibility of the parents, not the state, to raise and educate any children that they have." The state, in the father's opinion, is creeping steadlily towards authoritarianism.

2. "The education system has, in our opinion, failed."

3. "Derek was doing slightly above average in conventional school, but is doing much better now. Ryan was slightly below average in conventional school, but has improved dramatically."

4. "The state is allowing the influence of secular humanism to invade the classroom."

5. "We didn't like the idea of having no clue as to what our children were being taught from 8:30 to 5:00 every day."

6. "According to what we read in the newspapers and see on TV, Owen County schools are getting too rough; crime and drugs are on the rise."

Q: (asked to Debbie, who teaches the boys) What is your method for home schooling (i.e., how long do you spend on each

subject, what materials do you use, and how do you document progress?

A: "We spend as much time as it takes. If the boys are interested in what's being covered, the assignment takes as little as an hour. If the boys aren't interested, it can take two or three hours. The boys basically work at their own pace. As far as how long the assignments are, they just have a set number of pages that they have to do each day. No documentation is required by the state, but they are taking an assessment test soon."

Q: (Debbie) In your opinion, do the boys prefer home schooling over conventional schooling?

A: "Definitely. They achieve more, and seem to be happier."

Q: (Debbie) Do you feel that your children's academic skills are below, equal to, or above those of children of comparable age in conventional schools?

A: "Above, I think. I know part of that is mother's vanity, but I really do think that they do better."

Q: (Greg and Debbie) Do you feel that your children's social skills are below, equal to, or above those of children of comparable age in conventional schools?

A: "Because of their interaction with other kids in the home schooling group, they have a chance to be with kids their own age. And since all of the children come from similar religious and social backgrounds, they behave better and seem to be more mature. In short, their social skills are above those of kids in conventional school."

Q: (Ryan and Derek) Do you agree with your mother's opinion to the above question?

A: "We agree with mom. We think that we get along well with other kids; we don't fight or say nasty things like [regular] school kids do."

Clearly, these two parents feel that home schooling has made a difference with their children. Whether or not home schooling is for every family, and whether home schooling is detrimental to the social development of children is open to debate, and the debate will no doubt rage for some time to come.

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